

A personal view on composting.



or my daily battle with chickweed!

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Setting the scene.



The 'office'.



This wasn't successful, I had hoped for easier mixing and rotation— insufficient height.



A welcome sight when going into the late Autumn.

Tools

Solar-powered self-propelled rotary mower.

Solar-powered trimmer – can share batteries.

Petrol ride-on mower for leaf collection.

Petrol rotary mower for smashing tough weeds – quicker than feeding through the shredder.

Shredder – low-speed crushing/chopping action.

Pitchfork.

3-pronged cultivator for shifting compost within the bin.

Leaf-lifter.

5 x 40l buckets.

Thermometer – not essential.



Not often this amount of material but a trusty tool is at hand . . .



Talking of tools. I wouldn't be without this one.



One tool I once considered but research put me off completely – the theory is good but the practice is weak.



Another tool I consider not worth using. Again the theory is good but in practice it is awkward to use. The idea is to plunge the tool into the compost, rotate it a couple of times and then pull it out. The 'wings' are supposed to open out and drag the compost into a new position. Trying to do this at waist height and extended arms I found impossible. *We'll talk about the weeds later!*

I am fortunate in having an old silage pit for use for bonfires and leaf bins - difficult to keep tidy but nothing goes to waste.



Kipling's six honest working men

- Where – Findon Mills
- Who – yours truly
- Why – keep the place tidy and provide growing medium
- When – virtually every day that it is warm enough to be in the garden/tunnel
- What – the next part of the presentation
- How – and then for what you have been waiting

Materials not composted

Diseased

Too tough for shredder/mower

Hedge trimmings

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Otherwise anything else – I'm happy to add seeded material, tough roots etc.

Difficult to achieve a 4:1 mix of brown and green.

Sometimes add wood ash, poor quality leaf mould and saw dust.

How

1. Strim and mow the day's allocated section of grass depositing mowings in black cone.
2. Start collecting weeds by the bucket load and deposit each bucket-full into a wheelie bin in rotation.
3. Assuming compost bin 1 is available, using the pitchfork empty each wheelie bin, in turn, into the bin. If necessary add extra mowings from black cone using the leaf-lifter. This ensures each day's weeds are well distributed throughout the heap.
4. Cover with a sheet of black plastic and any insulation material (carpet) to hand.
5. Repeat exercise until bin 1 is full. Hopefully the previous loadings from the wheelie bin have maintained a reasonable temperature.

Using the 20cm probe I average 55C most times with a one-time maximum of 70C.

6. In the meantime I hope to be emptying some of the bins around the garden and tunnel, but usually land up having to move the compost from right to left to create an empty bin 2, ready to receive the contents of bin 1. Slow work!

Now for your help!

What am I not getting right?

The compost on the left has been like this for months without showing signs of weeds germinating, but an equivalent compost just months older when spread prior to the planting of the leeks started growing a luxuriant carpet of chickweed – the bane of my life! A few more examples follow.





Another example of poor compost – this time in the tunnel. This would have been added as a mulch in July 2023 and is 1 year old. You can just see in the background fewer weeds where the ground had Cucumbers and hadn't been mulched!



Example of typical mixture of weeds.

16th September – wheelie bins and extras just loaded into Bin 1. Very slow to reach 50C. Suspect it is too late in the year.

Examples of material in bins.



18th September. Bin 2 filled on 23rd August with extra material added on 11th September.



Hundreds of worms – a common sight on removal of the plastic cover especially if they are trying to escape from any heat below. Maturing since June 2023 – 3 months.